

Labour Unrest:

An Unofficial Inquiry.

DURING the recent trouble in the engineering trade a number of working men were asked to state their views upon the situation. Three questions were put to them:—

1. How far is the existing labour unrest due to purely economic causes, *e.g.*, wages questions and prices?

2. How far is it due to legislation and administration restrictive in character, *e.g.*, the Munitions Acts and their administration?

3. To what extent, if any, is it due to political causes, *e.g.*, is it connected with the pacifist movement? What influence, if any, has the Russian Revolution had?

In addition to this, we have consulted work-people in various parts of the country and people who are closely in touch with the situation.

The replies are for the most part by no means exhaustive, but much that they contain is worth recording as freely expressing the general attitude of mind of what must be a large body of working people. The widespread character of the unrest is generally recognized. Its roots are various, and, though we must confine ourselves to the main points, it is well to remember here that a considerable number of minor questions—unimportant perhaps in themselves—have contributed to create an atmosphere of discontent.

The wages question is a real factor, because of rising prices, allegations of rate-cutting, and difficulties with regard to women's wages. High food prices and what is called "profiteering" are closely associated in the public mind. The problem verges, however, on the ethical. The worker's rate of money wages has increased, it is true, and he has in many cases further augmented his income by overtime. But prices have risen by leaps and bounds, and the workman reads of the large dividends declared by firms of various kinds. The yield of the Excess Profits Tax is regarded as proof of the existence of "profiteering" on a large scale. There is, therefore, a general feeling that something is wrong, and an impression that there are people making great gains out of a national crisis.

HIGH PRICES.

In the woollen and worsted industry, we are told, there has been relatively little disturbance:—

"I think this indicates pretty accurately the workman's sense of fairness as between his employer and himself. He recognizes that his money wage to-day is much higher than that of pre-war days, but he knows perfectly well that his real wage, owing to high prices, is much less than formerly, and he feels that to strike for more wages is not to strike at the real cause of his difficulties. In the vivid language of a weaver to me lately, 'What the — is the use of going in for more money when the — shopkeeper will take it all and more besides the week after?'"

A Northern artisan in the engineering trade writes:—

"The working-class family budget has increased nearly 100 per cent on the pre-war standard of life on its expenditure side, and wages from 25 per cent to 30 per cent. My own wage for 53 hours per week has been advanced from 39s. to 51s., which I, in common with many others, supplement with overtime of between 7s. and 11s. per week, according to hours worked. We all feel that the Government has handled the regulation of food prices very badly. Somehow we feel very strongly that we are being plundered and exploited shamelessly by the 'patriotic' profiteers, and that the Government's protection has been scarcely evident."

A worker writing from the Midlands introduces another aspect of the question—the housewife:—

"Economic causes undoubtedly play a part, but only a small one, and are emphasized and exaggerated on the one side by the women at home, and the irritating administration of the various wages arrangements in the factory.... Previous to the War my own wages were about 45s. and to-day only 55s., so you can readily imagine what that means, especially when you are asked, to eat less bread, and it is the only thing one can get or afford, with the exception of milk. It is here where the influence of the women comes in, when they can't do as they did before the War.... [The cost of living] is a subject of daily conversation at home and in the workshop."

"PROFITEERING."

"Profiteering" naturally comes in for criticism. It may be that the general public does not understand the economic subtleties of trade, that it does not realize the whole truth, and that "profiteering" is not so rampant as is imagined. With the truth or untruth of the allegations concerning "profiteering" we are not at the moment concerned. The important thing is the feeling which the belief in the existence of

"profiteering" has engendered. The following sentences from a miner are to the point :—

"The Excess Profits Tax has not proved to be a redeeming feature; on the contrary, it rather illumines in a most glaring manner the activities of the alleged profiteers. The average man knows more about the exploitation of the community because of the tax, rather than less. Add to this the press reports of prosecutions, the glowing reports of private concerns, the unexampled extent to which repairs, experiments, and extensions of plant are taking place in all industries, many of which would obviously not have been done but for the War, and the opportunity to use profits in such a way as to evade the tax."

Another worker expresses himself as follows :—

"Another thing which has tended to bring the economic aspect into prominence is the fact of the huge profits which have been made out of the supply of war material, especially at a time when the working people were prepared to make almost any sacrifices; and it appears that those who called upon us to make them in the national interest, and were loudest in their professions of equality of sacrifice, only meant their interest and our sacrifice."

From Yorkshire comes the statement that

"the amount of money paid into the Treasury as excess profits duty was indeed a revelation, and we remembered that 40 per cent of the residue, less income tax, swelled the banking accounts of the rich, the powerful, and the fortunate."

A correspondent in a Northern town touches on the relative strengthening of the employers' position and the feeling of exploitation, with which large profits are associated in the workman's mind :—

"The wage-earners have also seen quite clearly that the employing and capitalist classes generally have been making huge profits in spite of the excess profits tax, and are also improving and strengthening their economic position, while labour's position has been undermined. Under such circumstances the worker has felt that he has been exploited for private profit."

This brings out one of the most frequently expressed grievances of the workers—that though they are being employed for national purposes, the harder they work, the greater the private gain of the employer. When indignant patriots compare the workman and the soldier, they forget that in the case of the latter the element of private gain does not exist. He is truly a servant of the State. In the case of the former the needs of the State become a source of enrichment to the employer.

WAGES QUESTIONS.

The particular wages questions which arouse discussion are those connected with women's wages and with rate-cutting. An observer in a Northern storm centre, who is not employed in the munitions trade, writes :—

"Although on the whole wages are good, no one feels sure of his job for any length of time, and employers and foremen are continually rate-cutting, and workmen are afraid to object for fear of being spotted for the army."

A good many of the disputes which have occurred have been concerned with allegations of rate-cutting. The strike at Barrow some

weeks ago is a case in point. On this head, it may be added, the trade unions have guarantees from the Government against the cutting of rates. The same letter refers to wages variations as an added complication :—

"The men who work on piecework on automatic machines can, if they get a good machine and plenty of work, earn from 6*l.* to 12*l.*, although they have had no previous experience, while a trained mechanic, without whom the machine cannot be kept going, gets from 3*l.* to 5*l.*, even when he works incessant overtime. It is, however, only a fraction who earn regularly high wages (say over 3*l.*) on automatic machines, but the whole thing varies in a very fantastic way and has no relation to variations of skill and industry."

There is a strong feeling amongst skilled artisans against the relatively low wages they receive as compared with the wages obtained by less skilled labour. This has assisted in widening the cleavage between skilled and less skilled workers.

The influx of women into new processes has caused male workers to take a much keener interest in women's wages. A workman writing six weeks ago said :—

"We have been trying now for some time to get a satisfactory answer with regard to the proper rates for women engaged on woodwork in the aircraft factories, but up to the present nothing is settled."

From a large manufacturing centre comes the statement that

"War bonuses, &c., are not ungrudgingly granted, particularly to women workers. In some cases women have received no war bonus, and this is tending to cause a cleavage between the sexes, which may be desirable from the masters' point of view, but certainly is not for the workers."

MILITARY SERVICE.

But important as these economic questions are, there can be little doubt that restrictive legislation and what is regarded as harsh administration are even more important as causes of unrest. The effect of the Military Service Acts and Munitions Acts has been to give large powers to employers and their representatives. One of our informants writes as follows :—

"At the — Works (whose director is —) a great proportion of the employees are in khaki, a continual source of irritation, and it is a common thing at these works for men to be threatened with the army for any slight breach of discipline, or refusing to work overtime when they have been practically exhausted, or for losing time. In fact, it has become quite a general thing to threaten a man with the army whenever he kicks against some new form of driving machinery."

A similar charge comes from another quarter :—

"In other parts of the works men have been threatened that if, &c., &c., they would be put into khaki, and this has been reported at branch meetings of the Union and roused intense resentment, increased by the reflection that the threats were used by a manager, 26 years of age, installed since the War began."

Again, we are informed that

"the arrogance of such employers has shown itself in many ways, and it is a common thing for the employer to threaten to send the workman into the army if he does not do just what is wanted. Employers have also tried to force men into the army when they have insisted on leaving and gone into other employment, and when strikes have occurred the military authorities have not been long, in many instances, in sending calling-up papers to the men of military age."

The question of exemptions has also given rise to dissatisfaction. Allegations are made of unfairness in awarding exemptions as between individuals and also as between classes of workers. Thus we are told :—

"There is also the feeling of unfairness. Tribunals have sent into the works large numbers of small tradesmen, publicans, &c., and it is suspected that in many cases jobs are 'bought' from the foremen, managers, &c.; or they are tenderly treated as regards exemptions, while men who have served their time are to be called up. It is felt, too, that these new men have no interest in trade unionism and will not attempt to maintain trade union conditions."

The following questions, which come from the Midlands, are also to the point :—

"Why does the army send soldiers into the factory and then call up skilled men from that same factory? It sounds like the conscription of labour."

In the same letter there is the statement that "here in — there are labourers who have received 'A' cards of exemption, whilst skilled men have received 'B' cards. It is an awful muddle. It seems as though I and many other skilled men will find ourselves in the army as those who are not doing work of national importance, while a hairdresser or butcher is put to do our job."

THE "TRADE CARD" SCHEME.

The Trade Card Scheme has been a source of irritation, and has embittered relations between the skilled men, on the one hand, and the semi-skilled and unskilled workers on the other. We were told by a semi-skilled workman in a large munitions centre that the feeling of the semi-skilled workers against the skilled men is stronger than their feeling against the Ministry of Munitions! The point of view of the less skilled workers is expressed by Mr. George Dallas of the Workers' Union. Referring to the recent strike, he said :—

"It is a strike to force all unskilled or semi-skilled men of military age into the army before any members of the A.S.E., whether they are 19 or 40, single or married, are called upon... We don't want the A.S.E. or any craft society to be treated unfairly, but we take the strongest possible objection to their sheltering their younger members from military service at the expense of the older married men of the semi-skilled and unskilled organizations."*

The skilled workers, on the other hand, have a grievance arising out of the "trade card" scheme, which provided machinery for their exemption from military service, and which was recently modified, perhaps with good reason, but

in a manner which aroused considerable hostility. The situation is described in the following extract :—

"I believe that one of the prime factors in the present unrest among the engineers is a belief that the Government definitely agreed with the A.S.E. as to the conditions of working the trade card system, and that one of the terms of the agreement was that no alteration should be made except after consultation with the National Executive; and that, without such consultation, and, indeed, without notice of any sort at all, the whole scheme has been scrapped, and an entirely new scheme substituted for it, and it is felt that this is a gross breach of faith on the part of the Government Departments concerned."

THE MINISTRY OF MUNITIONS.

The Ministry of Munitions comes in for much criticism. An independent observer, who is not engaged in industry, but is in very close touch with industrial life, says :—

"There is a widespread feeling of injustice and irritation arising out of the administration of the Defence of the Realm and Munitions of War Acts. There is also a great sense of irritation arising from what men regard as the incompetence of the officials of the Government Departments concerned in dealing with labour problems. To what extent there is justice in this feeling I am unable to say, but that a widespread feeling of lack of confidence in the Government officials concerned with labour questions exists is undoubtedly the fact. This feeling is not confined to the workmen, but extends also to the Union officials and to employers... There is a most lamentable feeling that nothing but such drastic action as the stoppage of work will give [the men] any chance of obtaining a hearing from the Government Departments. A most unfortunate feeling is spreading among the men that they have no chance of getting their grievances heard or considered except by stoppage of work."

A trade union official gives an instance of a dispute of which he had personal knowledge :—

"The Government representative threatened them [the men] with the Defence of the Realm Act. Some of the men opened their shirts and exposed their chests and said: 'You can put a bullet through, but we are not going to be forced to work under your conditions.'"

From the same source comes a criticism, with examples, of the kind of action—or inaction—which has led to mistrust and suspicion :—

"Another thing that has caused unrest under the Munitions Act is the stupid methods of the Wages Department and... the people who are running it. Let me give one or two cases :—

—Brick Trade.

"Bricks were urgently required at the — Works. They clearly come within Section 9 of the amending Act. The firms were adamant in refusing an increase. The case is reported, communications are forwarded to the firms, the firms merely state in their reply that they are not controlled. It is then forwarded to the Legal Department, who make this astounding reply through the Chief Industrial Commissioner: 'That the works do not come within the Munitions Act'—and the reason advanced, I understand, was that the Government was not limited to — to buy bricks. Therefore, because they thought they could buy bricks somewhere else with probably double the expense, the men did not come within the Act. The result was our executive had to hand in notices, which set the whole district in a ferment.

* *The Star*, May 14, 1917.

—*Carpenters.*

"I sat upon a Munitions Tribunal to hear a charge against the carpenters of — for striking. I find the Wages Department had hung the thing up by stupid muddling for fifty-five days from the time of notification until the men struck.

—*Gas Works.*

"The Government announced in the press that all the gas works of the country were now controlled. An employer wanted to introduce a profit-sharing scheme in the middle of the War. We objected, wanted an increase of wages, but the employer was stubborn. The Ministry of Munitions yielded to the employer and then informed us that the firm was not controlled, although controlled notepaper was being used. Finally, it was got over by the Chief Industrial Commissioner recommending that a definite requisition order under another section of the Act be made, but only after notices were handed in.

—*Soap Works.*

"I have just had an award to hand this morning which has taken us five months to get owing to the stupid action of the Wages Department, and then after a threatened strike.

"A further point connected with the Munitions Act is the enormous staffs that have been created—labour officers who have not the slightest knowledge of labour conditions—and the almost contemptuous attitude sometimes shown to labour. It is a common expression among all of us that if you want speedy arbitration, or the Act enforced on the employer, the only way to do it is to strike, paradoxical as it may seem. But the moment that Labour attempts to exercise even the limited rights under the Act some one in the Munitions Department sends out a threat about the Defence of the Realm Act."

A letter received from a worker in an engineering town reveals a sentiment identical with that expressed in other communications:—

"The workers under the Munitions Act also resent the way in which the Munitions Act has been worked, and feel that those in authority have shown throughout strong class prejudice against them. The clemency shown to the Lancashire firm—Smalley & Tweedale of Rochdale—in view of the seriousness of the results of their action, does not tend to inspire faith in the impartiality of the powers that be, when comparisons are made with punishments inflicted on workmen for small offences."

There can be little doubt that the prohibition of strikes has been an important factor in strengthening the position of the shop stewards, and there is considerable support for the following view:—

"One of the stupidest things the Government did was to make an order making it illegal to pay strike pay and inferring that the executives of unions could not be trusted."

WORKERS AND THE GOVERNMENT.

There are from many quarters charges of bad faith on the part of the Government, allegations of a conspiracy on the part of the Government to deprive Labour of its strength, and some dissatisfaction with the composition of the Government. The following are some expressions of opinion on this head. They do at any rate record the views of a section of the workers:—

"The very constitution of the Cabinet, which is considered to contain some of Labour's greatest enemies, has helped to make the Government suspect.

"A Government composed of the present Prime Minister, Lord Milner, and Lord Curzon does not add to the confidence

of working people. Lord Milner's attitude to Labour, and especially the memories of South Africa and the 'damn the consequences' speech, make his name a byword in the ordinary branches of the trade union movement."

An independent observer says:—

"I am inclined to think that there is a widespread feeling of want of confidence in the Government because it represents the capitalist organization of society."

UNREST AND PACIFICISM.

Though there is divergence of opinion as to the connexion of pacificism with the prevailing unrest, coloured perhaps by the views of those who have been consulted, it appears to be possible to arrive at a general summary of the position. Fundamentally, the prevailing unrest is independent of any anti-war feeling. Otherwise, considering the widespread character of the unrest, the continuance of the War would be totally impossible. Yet among the industrial discontents a minority of political discontents must be numbered. On the other hand, the doctrines of the pacificists find a congenial soil in the discontented state of mind of Labour. More than one correspondent refers to the existence of "war weariness," without going so far as to suggest that it is converting people into supporters of a stop-the-War policy. It is but just to state the views of those who seem to be in a minority:—

"The price of victory appears to the workers to be too costly. The first great cause of industrial unrest is war sickness, and I am afraid no tonic can remove it."

"The firstfruits of conscription are now coming home in the casualty lists, and hundreds round here, formerly loyal to the cause, are now bitter opponents of the War."

A middle position on the question is taken by a miner who is himself a pacificist:—

"There is a feeling of war weariness which is not at bottom pacificist, but which at the same time tends to become so; although it is at present a rather strange blend of pacificism and a kind of desire not to give way to a foreign militarism."

A worker in the heart of the Midlands, who expresses a general view on the question, says:—

"It is wholly unjust to say that the worker is not loyal. It is a gross libel to say that the workers are traitors because they strike. If it had not been that the mass of workers were absolutely loyal to their brothers in the trenches, there would have been terrible times in the industrial world. I suppose that about 60 per cent of those engaged on munitions have not had a holiday away from home since 1914. In mind and body they are worn out."

From another part of the country the note is the same:—

"I think Labour is still solid for the War. I have not seen much evidence personally to warrant the view that the shifting policies internationally have changed the temper of Labour on the general question of the War."

THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION.

There is more general agreement as to the effects of the Russian Revolution in Labour circles. The following statements, made by

people engaged in different industries in different parts of the country, are similar in tone :—

"The Russian Revolution, I think, has had a very marked effect on the mind of the workers; not in producing discontent or giving rise to revolutionary sentiments, but rather in suggesting a way out of these difficulties. And the cry more and more methinks will be heard for a people's war, a people's peace, and a people's industrial reform. Labour has been seething for a while. The Russian Revolution came; and Labour is now, in my judgment, feeling its way towards an expression of industrial, social, and political power."

"The Russian Revolution has affected the situation to a small extent, as it has been the means of inspiring many workers with renewed hope and courage for the cause of democracy. I do not think, however, that it has as yet contributed very much to present Labour unrest, as its influence has not yet matured."

"The Russian Revolution has created aspirations in the minds of every thoughtful workman for freedom here at home."

A GENERAL SUMMARY.

We may now endeavour to summarize the chief factors. Early in the War the Government took its stand on the law of supply and demand, so far as prices were concerned, and on loans rather than on taxation. The workmen were informed that their course was to get higher wages if they could. Almost from the beginning, therefore, the country found itself in a vicious circle of war profits, high prices, war bonuses, and increases of wages. As is generally the case, prices outstripped wages, and workpeople felt that their physical needs were being exploited, and that a large number of workers, though engaged on national work, were making extra efforts which swelled the profits of the employer. Labour agreed to the abrogation of its customs and practices in the national interest, and now finds that added gains accrue to employers, whose position is thereby strengthened. Then the Munitions Acts, intended largely to protect Labour, and the Defence of the Realm Act, intended for the defence of the realm, have, in many instances, operated rather to protect and defend the employer and to give him a power over his labour far greater than that which he previously wielded. He can push a man into the army or, by refusing to grant him a leaving certificate, put the man in the position of choosing between submission and six weeks' unemployment. Further, the Ministry of Munitions is, rightly or wrongly, charged with being anti-Labour. It is said that its Labour officers are too often ill-equipped for their work, and cases are brought forward to prove the great delays which have occurred in dealing with disputes. In consequence the men have realized that the only way to get disputes settled is to strike or threaten to strike. There is also mistrust of dilution and substitution, and opposition to the methods by which they have been carried out. These questions have, moreover, worsened the relations

between the skilled and semi-skilled men in the engineering trades, and introduced into the trade union movement an additional complication. The Government is charged with making pledges and then breaking them, with the result that a large majority of trade unionists put little faith in promises made by the Government. There appears to be an underground agitation, pacifist in character, a stop-the-War policy being actively propagated in industrial circles. The Russian Revolution has been welcomed, partly for its own sake, partly as an object lesson. Why, it is asked, should Russia gain her freedom during the War and Britain lose it? The general industrial situation is darkened by a brooding fear for the future which hangs like a heavy cloud over the whole Labour Movement. Harassed as trade unionists may be by present difficulties and problems, they are naturally perturbed with regard to the ultimate effects upon the status of Labour of the conditions arising out of the War.

SOME OTHER FACTORS.

It may be admitted that charges can be levelled against sections of the workers, that the employers have a presentable case of their own, and that, anyhow, they are part of a system. It may be urged with truth that since the beginning of the War the Government has been overwhelmed with great responsibilities, that it has had to improvise machinery and methods as it went along, that every situation has had to be dealt with as it arose, and that mistakes were inevitable. It is, of course, easy to be wise after the event; it is equally easy for those without responsibility to hurl criticisms at those in authority. Labour difficulties, it should be pointed out, have been accentuated by the fact that Labour as a whole is but imperfectly articulate, that trade union terminology is inadequate to express grievances which stretch into the region of social ethics. It is unfortunately true that a number of national trade union leaders are too remote from the life of the lathe and the bench to be representative of the rank and file. They were excellent men a quarter of a century ago, but they are no longer responsive to the currents of thought and feeling which are moulding the masses. A disturbing circumstance which has introduced a cross-current into the flood of discontent is the internecine warfare within the trade union movement itself. Which leads us to say that trade union organization was no more able to cope with the new situation than was our national organization.

A NEW POLICY NEEDED.

It is clear that the path of industrial life could in no circumstances have been a smooth one

during the War. Labour troubles have been common to all the belligerent manufacturing countries. And it may be remembered that some achievements stand on the credit side, the chief of which has undoubtedly been the organization of production, which has increased the output of munitions in a remarkable degree. It would, however, be folly, with three years of extremely valuable experience behind us, not to use it to the fullest possible extent in the immediate future. We may as well recognize at the outset that it will be almost impossible to remove entirely the canker of discontent. Yet it is vital that the heart of it should be cut out. The negotiations between the Ministry of Munitions and the unions concerned will result in improving the new Munitions Amendment Bill, and the situation will be eased in some degree. But the Bill will do no more than ease the situation, and we need not, therefore, dwell upon it. It is the industrial atmosphere which is wrong. It is the temper and state of mind of Labour which must be changed. The Munitions Amendment Bill may go some little way in improving the state of mind, but only a little way. The need is for a new atmosphere, for a new spirit in administration.

A NEW MINISTRY OF LABOUR.

It was recently stated in the House of Lords that steps were being taken to co-ordinate the work of departments dealing with Labour questions. This can only mean the co-ordination of the Ministry of Labour, the whole of the Labour side of the Ministry of Munitions, and the Labour Department of the Admiralty (for the establishment of which there was absolutely nothing to be said). It would be a wise step to take the administration of Labour questions away altogether from the Ministry of Munitions. It would have an excellent chastening effect upon the Ministry of Munitions to reduce it to the level of a third-rate department. As a Ministry of War Supplies it would perhaps gain a sense of proportion.

The result of this change would be enormously to increase the importance of the Ministry of Labour. It cannot be pretended that such a development would in itself produce any real change in administration. Mr. John Hodge has many qualities, but even if he possessed the qualities necessary for the work, the attitude of the trade unions towards him would make the full use of those qualities impossible. The unfortunate fact is that Mr. John Hodge is not held in such high regard by Labour as he presumably is by the Government. In his place is needed a statesman. We suggest no name; a minister is needed with imagination, initiative, power, courage, wide knowledge, and

sympathy—a combination of qualities difficult to find! It must be insisted that the key to the national situation, to the successful prosecution of the War, to the hopes of future Reconstruction, is the Labour situation. It is important, therefore, that the office of Minister of Labour should be filled by a man of great qualities.

THE QUESTION OF OFFICIALS.

Clearly the co-ordination of Labour departments with the same personnel as before will not necessarily alter the administration. There should be a courageous overhauling of the staffs in order to remove the minority of officials who have neither the experience nor the temperament for administrative work in connexion with Labour questions. Both employers and workmen, for example, are dissatisfied with certain of the Labour officers of the Ministry of Munitions. Matters cannot be expected to improve whilst these officials remain. But other and more important officials, who are responsible for policy, give cause for dissatisfaction. To take an illustration. In the past, when there was the prospect of a strike, or when a strike had actually broken out, the newspapers, presumably on the information and suggestion of the Ministry of Munitions, enlarged upon the wickedness of the men in holding up, or threatening to hold up, the production of munitions. The Press Bureau, or whoever was responsible, never acquainted the public with the real causes of the dispute. And if it turned out that the men had legitimate grievances and that the employer or employers had been in the wrong, nothing more was said. Never on any single occasion, so far as we are aware, has the Ministry of Munitions through the columns of the press brought to task employers in the same way as it has brought to task the workpeople. Now, that argues unfair treatment. The officials who are responsible for a policy of this character are not fitted for their work, and they should be transferred to work of a different kind.

A SUGGESTED POLICY.

(a) CENTRAL COMMITTEES.

Changes of the kind suggested would be a necessary first step to reform; but further steps are necessary. The function of the Minister of Labour is to evolve an industrial policy which will fulfil the general requirements of the Government, and to see that it is carried out in the spirit. He is responsible to the Government, and he must develop his policy in conjunction with that of other departments of State. When, however, he comes to apply his policy in industry he then needs the advice and co-operation of those familiar with industry, viz., employers and

employed. There was set up some time ago a Labour Advisory Committee, but nobody—at least nobody outside—appears to have taken it seriously. Committees of this kind are necessary, but if they are to be useful the organizations concerned must be allowed to appoint their own representatives. A representative committee of employers and a similar committee of trade unionists, each presided over by the Minister himself, would be a distinct gain. As occasion required the committees could meet jointly. It would then be possible for the Ministry of Labour to develop a general policy which could be translated into administration.

(b) DISTRICT COMMITTEES.

One of the weaknesses of the Ministry of Munitions in the past has been that it evolved into a centralized bureaucracy. Little will be achieved apart from a policy of devolution. It is in the munitions areas that we touch realities, and joint local committees of employers and trade unionists are indispensable if there is to be full discussion and negotiation, by the people intimately concerned, of local problems as they arise. It is impossible to lay down in detail the precise constitution and composition of each District Committee, but these Joint Committees should be composed equally of representatives of employers and trade unions, with representatives of the Ministry of Labour. The District Committees would deal with wages in so far as wages were dealt with by district organizations of the trade unions, the enforcement of wages awards, and the co-ordination of workshop practices in the district. The Committees should also investigate the question of departures from trade union rules, so that the schedule of departures may be as complete as possible. They should be responsible for the proper execution of agreements arrived at between the parties affected with regard to dilution and substitution.

(c) WORKS COMMITTEES.

The principle of Joint Committees should be carried, where it is practicable, down to the workshops. If Works Committees, representative of the management and the workers, are to be effective, the workers' side must in some way be closely linked with the trade unions concerned. It is clear also that they must be strictly subordinate to the District Committees, and that they must not take action overriding any agreement between trade unions and employers' associations. Within these limits the Works Committees would have a useful sphere of activity. After all, it is the workshop where trouble arises, where rates are cut, where men are dismissed, where the petty tyrannies of

managers and foremen are exercised, and where friction generally arises.

It is unnecessary to enter into the question of the precise composition and constitution of Joint Shop Committees. The details may be left to settle themselves if the limitations of the functions of the Committees, and the position of the trade unions, be recognized.

THE APPOINTMENT OF "RATE-FIXERS."

It is worth considering also whether further steps may be taken inside the shop. In the coal-mining industry the miners have power to appoint, at their own expense, a checkweighman, whose chief duty is to protect the wages of the workers by checking the weight of coal hewn. The system is universal, so that in a colliery the workers have a paid official of their own in a position of some authority. If in engineering works a similar system could be established, shop stewards might be appointed as rate-fixers in conjunction with the rate-fixer of the firm, the steward acting also as secretary of the workers' side of the Shop Committee.

THE TRIPLE ORGANIZATION.

This triple organization—a National Committee, District Committees, and Shop Committees—would remove many of the causes of discontent by substituting adequate machinery for full discussion and negotiation for the more or less bureaucratic administration of the Ministry of Munitions. Decisions on matters of policy would not be converted into orders and regulations until they had been approved within the trades—a proceeding which, if it took more time at the beginning, would avoid much delay and negotiation later. This method would supersede much of the existing machinery of administration, and would relieve the Government of the necessity of threatening the workers with the Defence of the Realm Act.

THE WAR OFFICE AND MEN.

We may now turn to a question which has a distinct bearing on the present unrest and which involves the War Office. No one will deny for a moment the strength of the feeling against the operation of the military machine. With regard to the supply of men, the military authorities have stepped beyond the bounds of their real functions. Questions as to the number and kind of men required for the army, and the time when they will be wanted, are naturally matters upon which the military authorities are alone competent to decide. In view of industrial requirements the particular individuals to be called should be decided by a civil authority, other things being equal. It would be a great gain if the War Office would come to some definite

understanding on this matter with the reorganized Ministry of Labour which could be made public.

THE TREATMENT OF "PROFITEERING."

Nothing would give greater satisfaction to the general public than to confiscate all war profits. It is only because of lack of imagination, or confused economic ideas, or excessive tenderness towards the propertied classes, that this question was not taken in hand at the beginning of the War. In spite of the complications which would have been raised it might have been done with relatively no opposition in the early days, and much bitterness would have been avoided. It is not too late even now to take practical steps. If nothing be done, it will be impossible to convince the rank-and-file of the workers that the Government is desirous of allaying the prevailing discontent. It will, on the other hand, be assumed that the Government is solicitous only for the well-to-do, and that it does not intend to introduce more than sham reforms. Let the Government, therefore, adopt some method whereby swollen profits are disgorged. It is impossible in a short space to deal with this subject. It may be suggested, however, that a choice should be offered between the average profits for the three years prior to the War and 5 per cent, the rest being taken by the State. The scheme would be by no means as simple as it appears at first sight; but the fact that there are many complications to be faced does not render it impracticable. The questions of new firms, watered capital, more rapid depreciation in some cases during the War, war extensions, and the adaptation of plant to new purposes, would all need careful consideration. The principle of paying what amounts to a commission should be extended to cover all direct Government orders.

FOOD PRICES.

Food control is on the whole a more difficult problem than the treatment of "profiteering." There is, however, a general disposition to trust Lord Rhondda to deal seriously with the question, and the Prime Minister has pledged the Government to drastic action.

AS FOR THE GOVERNMENT—

As for the Government, and the Governments which preceded it—all of them harassed and overworked—they must be held responsible for the industrial unrest of to-day. It is unfortunate, perhaps, but nevertheless inevitable, that war Governments should be open to severe criticism, both just and unjust. The wisest Government could not have foreseen the developments which followed the outbreak of war, and blunders were to be expected. The Government has been badly advised on Labour questions, and

has, apparently, continued to accept advice when previous advice has obviously been wrong. The reason is not far to seek. The present War Cabinet is far too deeply immersed in immediate questions affecting the prosecution of the War to think at all clearly upon other questions, and is unable to give the continuous attention to home affairs which is essential, even for the prosecution of the War. The difficulty would be met by setting up a Cabinet for civil affairs, which would give its undivided attention to domestic problems, of which the largest is the Labour question. Let the Government find a new Minister of Labour and set up a Civil Cabinet, and it would not only be relieved of work which it is impossible for it to deal with, but it would find itself strengthened in its task of winning the War.

THE URGENCY OF THE PROBLEM.

As we write there are strikes in progress and disputes dragging on. It is a normal feature of our domestic life. And in this warfare there is deep bitterness. Contrast this state of affairs with the cessation of industrial hostilities which followed the outbreak of war. The contrast is significant. It is idle to pretend that the widespread unrest of to-day is merely the work of irresponsible agitators. Even making every allowance for long hours and overwork, there is still left a large volume of deep discontent, which, unless it is dissipated, will grow and necessarily impede the prosecution of the War. It may be possible to continue to the end of the War with matters as they stand at present, but it would be most unwise to assume that exasperation may not before the end flare out in revolt. It is playing with fire not to take the necessary action to deal with the position. Moreover, we cannot disregard the effects of unrest upon the post-war situation. The period immediately after the War will be one of great difficulty and uncertainty—a time which will call for the full co-operation of all sections of the community. To enter the transition period with a large section of the population alienated, discontented, and suspicious would be the greatest danger conceivable. Once the appeal to consider "the boys in the trenches" can no longer be made, once the restraining influence of a great international crisis is over, the smouldering embers of unrest may easily burst into uncontrollable flames. In other words, Reconstruction will be impossible, and the hope of a new social synthesis will vanish like mist, if at the conclusion of the War the temper of Labour is such that there will be an outbreak of bitter industrial and social warfare. The Government will be wise to have regard for the future and to make bold attempts to control the forces heading for disruption whilst there is yet time.

